

THE GOTHIC PALACE OF VYTAUTAS AND ALEXANDER JAGIELLON

Gothic features started becoming apparent in the architecture of the Vilnius Lower Castle in the second half of the 14th century. Following the introduction of Christianity in Lithuania in 1387 Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland Jogaila (1377–1381, 1382–1434) had a brick cathedral built as part of the Lower Castle and donated an earlier constructed brick building to the bishop of Vilnius.

In 1413–1414 the emissary of the Duke of Burgundy, Ghillebert de Lannoy, visited the Vilnius castles and described them: “the castle is built upon a very high sandy hill fortified with stone, earth and bricks. The castle interior is finished in wood. The settlement within the castle grounds extends down the hilltop along two slopes to the base. Within this settlement, surrounded by a brick wall, there are many houses. Grand Duke Vytautas, the ruler of Lithuania, is usually found in the castle or its courtyard. This is where he has his court and office”. A document from 1413 mentions that Grand Duke Vytautas (1392/1401–1430) lived *in castro inferiori Wilnensi in caminata lignea* – in the Lower Castle of Vilnius in a wooden hall with a hearth. After the fire of 1419, he reconstructed the Vilnius castles and rebuilt and expanded the Cathedral, where in 1430 he planned to be crowned king of Lithuania. Upon his death, Vytautas was buried at the Vilnius Cathedral.

Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland Alexander Jagiellon (1492/1501–1506) moved his residence from the Upper to the Lower Castle. During his rule, the Vilnius castles became the centre of the state’s political and administrative life. The marriage ceremony of Alexander Jagiellon and Helen, daughter of the Grand Duke of Moscow Ivan III took place in Vilnius in 1495. In 1492–1501 the courts of Alexander and his wife Helen, which consisted of about 1,500 people, had to be accommodated in the city. The Vilnius residence had to be adapted to meet the new requirements of its ceremonial and administrative functions and its changing daily life. The actual extent of construction or reconstruction is not really known. Perhaps expansion of the Lower Castle was limited to reconstructing earlier buildings or building new wooden ones. Alexander’s renovations may have been destroyed during later reconstruction work. Work also began on the defensive wall that surrounded the city of Vilnius, which together with the Vilnius castles comprised a complete defensive system.



Portrait of Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, unknown 18th-century painter after a prototype in the Chapel of Lublin Castle, LDM



Fresco of the Crucifixion from Vilnius Cathedral Crypt, late 14th century, LDM



Decorative brick showing the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist, early 15th century, LDKVR



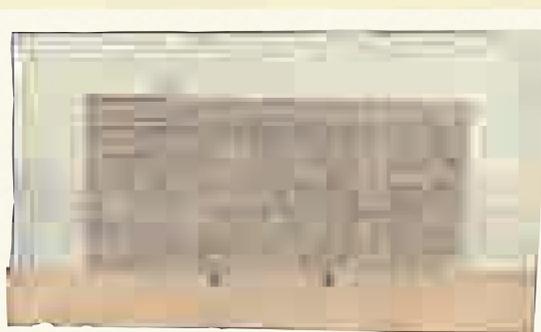
Grand Duke Vytautas (?) sitting on a throne; from the heraldic records of the Library of the Arsenal in Paris, ca 1555, BnF



Portrait of Alexander Jagiellon, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, from the Dominican Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius, 18th century, LDM



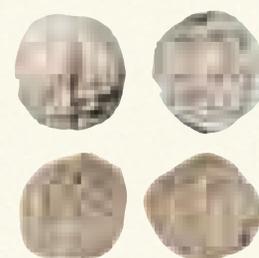
Western facade of St Anne Church in Vilnius, RPL



Privilege from Jogaila to the Vilnius bishop and cathedral, testimony of Lithuania's Christianization and the start of conversion, Vilnius, February 17, 1387, LMAVB



Stove tile with the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, 15th century, LDKVR



First coins of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: denarius of Jogaila, 1386–1387; denarius of Vytautas, ca 1392–1396, LNM



Sword, placed in the coffin of Alexander Jagiellon in 1506, late 15th–early 16th century, LDM



Vilnius castles in the late 14th–early 15th century, Napaleonas Kitkauskas, 2006, PTC